

Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel

Meeting Minutes & Recommendations

Site Address:	55 Smith Street Summer Hill
Proposal:	A Section 8.2A Review requested by the applicant to review a boarding house proposal
Application No.:	REV 2021 0024
Meeting Date:	22 February 2022
Previous Meeting Date:	None
Panel Members:	Jon Johannsen (external member); Diane Jones (external member); Niall Macken (internal member); and Vishal Lakhia (internal member) – chair
Apologies:	-
Council staff:	Conor Wilson
Guests:	-
Declarations of Interest:	None
Applicant or applicant’s representatives to address the panel:	Joseph Panetta (Habitation) – Architect for the project; and Andrew Martin (AM Planning) – Town Planner for the project

Background:

1. The Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel reviewed the architectural drawings and 3D views, and discussed the proposal with the applicant through an online conference.
2. The Panel notes that the applicant is seeking feedback as part of a Section 8.2A Review considering the challenges presented by the proposal, particularly with regards to the extent of the proposed floor space ratio that significantly exceeds the maximum permissible LEP control for the site. The Panel understands there is a 32 percent FSR exceedance based on the Housing SEPP 2021 calculations anticipated under the ‘Co-Living’ (boarding house) use.

Discussion & Recommendations:

1. Site Planning Strategy:

- a. The Panel identified a number of fundamental concerns with the proposal arising primarily from a flawed site planning strategy that positions 4 parallel buildings across the East-West axis, in order to capitalise on the exceptional lot depth (of approximately 104m). The applicant’s approach appears to be driven by a density maximisation rationale at the expense of good urban, landscape, environmental and residential design principles.
- b. The site planning lacks consideration of street address for a majority of the development (3 out of 4 buildings), which also complicates the pedestrian arrival sequence for the residents

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within the rear buildings, and as a consequence isolates these residents from the public domain. The pedestrian access and movement for the residents and visitors appears to be convoluted and reliant on excessive travel distances from Smith Street.

- c. The building separation distances (including internal building separation, side and rear setback) are constrained as these are below the best-practice standards expected for boarding houses within the Inner West local government area. The Panel understands that according to the Housing SEPP 2021 formalised since November 2021, the building separation distances are expected to be consistent with the guidance offered under the SEPP 65 Apartment Design Guide.

2. Landscape:

- a. While the Panel appreciates provision of universal access from Smith Street, the design of the ramp should be more thoughtfully integrated with the landscaped design (to prevent the institutional appearance associated with 1:14 ramps) presenting the street frontage and incorporating some casual social bump space for residents to complement common rooms.
- b. A thoughtful allocation for deep soil areas is required as part of the overall site planning strategy. In order to improve interface with the adjoining properties, the Panel considers that the rear and side boundaries should be provided with generous deep soil areas with appropriate soil volume to allow large canopy trees and shrubs.
- c. The Panel strongly encourages the co-location of that deep soil areas with the communal open spaces, to allow planting of large canopy trees and shrubs within the communal gardens. In the current configuration all communal areas are located over the common basement structure. Any planting on structure will require approximately 1.2m raised planter boxes which will further compromise the amenity and spatial quality on the ground floor.
- d. The Panel notes that the currently proposed double-width vehicular ramp should be reduced to a single lane ramp with a wider car waiting bay provided near the footpath. The ramp is further required to be well-integrated with the landscape design, for example with a pergola and vine extending over the driveway structure.
- e. The applicant should investigate the possibility of reducing the car parking rates within the scheme, as the Panel understands that the Housing SEPP 2021 requires a significantly lower rate. Reduction in car parking will provide the opportunity of decreasing the basement outline and increasing the extent of deep soil planting within the proposal.

3. Built Form:

- a. The Panel does not support the proposed floor-to-floor height of 2.8m as it is below the acceptable standard required for achieving design excellence. It is the Panel's concern that a 2.8m floor-to-floor height would result in constrained ceiling heights of – 2.4m within the habitable areas and 2.1m (excluding service bulkheads) within the kitchenettes and bathrooms.
- b. The Panel expects the floor-to-floor heights to be increased in order to achieve a minimum 2.7m clear ceiling height within all habitable areas, to comply with the Inner West DCP and to accommodate ceiling fans.
- c. The Panel raised concern regarding habitable areas proposed within the subterranean spaces on Buildings B, C and D in terms of potential outlook and amenity concerns for several boarding rooms. Therefore, the overall built form strategy is not supported by the Panel.
- d. The Panel queried the applicant about the size, functionality, comfort and amenity achieved within several boarding rooms and bathrooms.
- e. The location of the common room at the far rear of the site does not take advantage of the opportunity for this space to become a focal point for the development where a sense of community can be engendered.

- f. The fenestration design requires thoughtful consideration, for example – the glazed sliding doors should be provided with additional top level operable windows, to allow natural ventilation without relying on opening the sliding door. Additionally, the fixed windows along the side boundaries should be provided as operable louvers to allow natural cross ventilation into the corner rooms.
- g. The Panel expressed concern regarding a lack of direct solar access within the courtyards, common open spaces, communal rooms and habitable areas of the proposal at mid-winter.
- h. The Panel queried whether a proposal with 97 boarding rooms would require a substation. The amenity and quality of ground floor could be further compromised after incorporating realistically sized building services requirements, for example – a substation, fire hydrant booster valve, pump room, fire indicator panel, meters panel, main switch board, communications, letter boxes, etc.
- i. The Panel notes that waste storage is allocated within the basement, however, the bin collection anticipated from the street could be problematic as the quality of street interface would be compromised with a large number of bins presented within the public domain for collection.
- j. Consideration must be made for privacy of balconies and open spaces directly off units facing the street, and also how resident storage might visually impact on these elevations that are very visible from the public domain.
- k. Revised architectural drawings should include details on the location and size of the plant room, including any mechanical equipment or condensers for the rooms. The equipment should not be located within the balconies (unless thoughtfully integrated with screens), above the rooftop, within the communal open spaces, or anywhere visible from the public domain. Incorporation of solar p/v panels on the flat roofs would be encouraged.
- l. Additionally, the Panel expressed concerns regarding several issues – the proposed dark colour palette, bicycle parking location, internal room configuration, ground floor activation, accurate depiction of the lift shafts on drawings (typically 4.5m above the top-most floor), and the overall architectural expression. These do not form the focus of the Panel's AEDRP Report. Rather, it is the fundamental site planning and urban design issues that need to be considered as a priority.

Conclusion:

1. The Architectural Excellence & Design Review Panel considers that the proposal, in its current form and configuration, is not supported as it does not meet the standards of urban design and residential quality expected for achieving design excellence for a boarding house within the Inner West local government area.
2. The applicant should consider alternative site planning and urban design strategies to ensure that the boarding house proposal aligns closely with Council's 'community' aspirations, rather than a built form driven by a density maximisation rationale at the expense of good urban and residential design qualities. Street address, pedestrian access and movement, residential comfort, residential outlook, amenity, privacy, solar access, natural cross ventilation, and concurrently landscape design are required to be at the heart of the proposal.
3. The Panel expects the applicant to consider the abovementioned alternative site planning and urban design strategies, (possibly including 3 high-level schematic scenarios, including a preferred option) as part of a new Pre DA discussion.